

# Baker Details U.S. Response To Coercion

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Secretary of State James A. Baker III, citing U.S. national interest, told a House committee yesterday that the administration response to Soviet economic coercion of Lithuania would probably center on curbing "bilateral commercial contacts" with Moscow.

Baker's carefully measured statement was the administration's most detailed expression of its views on U.S. countermeasures that were promised by President Bush Tuesday against Soviet economic pressures on Lithuania. Baker appeared to exclude arms control negotiations and U.S.-Soviet discussion of regional conflicts from possible cutbacks, narrowing the U.S. responses to the economic field.

Baker's statement, which won praise from Democrats and Republicans on the House Ways and Means Committee, came before reports from Lithuania said the flow of crude oil had been shut off by Soviet authorities. Administration officials said they had no confirmation of the reports and that they would have no response last night.

Bush, meanwhile, received a written appeal from Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis for "concrete help" in the face of an economic blockade that Landsbergis labeled "aggression."

The letter, written last Saturday, was delivered to the White House yesterday and made public by the Lithuanian Information Center here.

Earlier in the day, administration officials were intrigued—and for some hours encouraged—by a Moscow report from the Soviet news agency Tass denying that supplies of oil and gas to Lithuania had been stopped and saying "there have been no instructions from the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers on this matter."

This unusual dispatch from Moscow came on the heels of a report

by Daniel Schorr on National Public Radio that the Tass bureau chief in Washington, Vladimir Matyash, had told CIA Director William H. Webster at a reception Tuesday night that Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev would rescind the energy cutoff threat against Lithuania. Yesterday afternoon, however, Matyash denied the story, saying that Schorr misunderstood his conversation with Webster.

Baker's statement to the Ways and Means Committee in long-scheduled testimony on Soviet and East European economic issues appeared to reflect a 40-minute discussion by Bush with members of the National Security Council late Tuesday. Sources said no decisions were made at the meeting.

"The people of Lithuania must not be denied their rights," said Baker, repeating the longstanding U.S. refusal to recognize the forcible incorporation of Lithuania and the other Baltic states into the Soviet Union in 1940. He called for the start of a dialogue between Moscow and the Lithuanians—"dialogue, not economic boycotts or threats to invoke presidential rule."

At the same time, he declared, "our policy toward the Soviet Union is shaped by what's in *our* interest." Baker then listed several items of U.S. interest—freedom of Eastern Europe from Soviet forces, cutbacks in Soviet tanks and nuclear weapons in arms control negotiations, the settlement of regional conflicts and continuation of the reform process in the Soviet Union "so it will be more committed to internal progress than external expansion."

On the other hand, Baker said "some of our bilateral commercial contacts" (adding the word "commercial" to his prepared text) "may be more directly in their interest than in ours" and that these "are being put to risk by Soviet actions—even short of force—in Lithuania."

Elsewhere in his testimony Baker listed a U.S.-Soviet trade agreement, most-favored-nation trade status for the Soviet Union, and negotiations on bilateral investment and tax treaties and grains, civil aviation and maritime transportation agreements as "bilateral commercial initiatives."

Staff writers Helen Dewar and A.D. Horne contributed to this report.